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NARRATOR. Hibbits

INTERVIEWER. Lotz

PLACE Studio, Buellton

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Interview with Forrest Hibbits

Date of Interview: January 5, 1986, Hibbits Studio, Buellton

Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz

Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

When did you decide that you wanted art for your career?

Mr. H: Well, I think in the last years of high school, I had an art teacher there who encouraged me. And then she knew about the art school in Oakland, California, the California School of Arts and Crafts.

PL: Where did you go to high school?

Mr. H: In Lompoc

PL: Was there a significant fee to go to the College of Arts and Crafts?

Mr. H: Well, you have to pay to go and my parents paid for me. I lived in Berkeley and in Oakland and I lived by myself. I did work part time in a restaurant.

PL: Your parents were farming people?

Mr. H: Yes, I come from a farm in Lompoc.

PL: Was there anyone in your family who was an artist before you?

Mr. H: Well no, my father could draw a little but he had no formal training. It was for his own pleasure.

PL: How many years were you at art school?

Mr. H: From 1925 to 1928, I graduated in 1928 and after that I went to San Francisco and worked as a commercial artist in advertizing art.

PL: Coming from such a small community as Lompoc, how did

Oakland and San Francisco seem to you?

Mr. H: It was quite a transition for me, difficult, a small town to a large city and I was quite homesick part of the time.

PL: You are the oldest of three children?

Mr. H: Yes, I would come home during vacation time and help on the farm, hoeing beans and things like that, and I also always came home at Christmas.

After graduating I went to live in San Francisco, this was during the beginning of the depression and I was out of work for periods of time. I worked at various jobs, as an artist on the S.F. Examiner and also at some art services. The work at the newspaper was of a minor type just a little black and white advertizing, illustrations and not very interesting.

PL: What were the different classes one could take at the California School of Arts and Crafts?

Mr. H: Some of the students asked for special courses, some went on to be teachers but I was more interested in illustration and so forth. I took the regular course that was called Arts and Crafts at that time. I did not go into crafts too much. I did a lot of drawing and painting in oil and water color and lots of figure drawings and landscape drawings. Part of the instruction was out of doors classes. We had some commercial art work doing lettering design.

PL: Were you pleased with this school?

Mr. H: Oh yes, I knew that this was what I wanted to do, but of

course after I got out (of art school) and right into the depression for a long period of time ther was a shortage of jobs. I came home and worked one summer, it was so bad that I just stayed at home, but finally I got a fairly good job. This was the time of the San Francisco World's Fair (1939) and there was a good deal of work at the fair. I did the fair poster and some work for Sunset Magazine.

PL: Did you go out to Treasurer Island (site of the World's Fair) when you were working on illustrations for the Fair?

Mr. H: Yes, in fact I made the Fair Poster, the official poster that was used all over the world. The company I worked for did not even put my name on the poster as the designer. I never did get credit for that and I was irritated about that. (Mr. Hibbits shows me a copy of the poster)

PL: World War II soon started after that, were you drafted into military service?

Mr. H: Yes, I was drafted first into the Army soon after the war broke out after Pearl Harbor and I was in the Army for a short time and then the Army Air Corps, that became the Air Force after the war. First my work was with aircraft machine guns and I went to armament school, then finally during the last year of the war I was put in with a bunch of other artists in Santa Ana and worked as an artist.

PL: Where did you get your basic training?

Mr. H: Monterey for a short time and then to Texas and finally to Arizona where I spent a lot of time. I finally became a

corporal. I always said that was as high as you could go and still have friends. That was as high as Hitler got and Napoleon. I was satisfied.

PL: Were you ever involved with the W.P.A. The Works Project Administration during the depression?

Mr. H: No, but a good many of my friends were but instead of getting a job with the WPA I went home and worked on the farm in Lompoc which was better in one way, but that program gave many artists a start at that time. I met Channing Peake one summer at the art school in Oakland, I think he was there on a scholarship. He later did some murals in Santa Barbara.

PL: What about your military service?

I was in for four years and during that last year in Santa Ana, I was doing the same type of work I had done in civilian life, posters and illustrations to be used in recruitment and trainign fliers. It wa a good year for me and more in my line of work. Machine guns was not for me. I remember sometimes the planes would come back from a mission and the guns had jammed and the officer would turn the guns over to me to fix and I found that if I put a little oil on the gun it would work.

PL: When were you discharged?

In Sept. 1945 and I went up to Sacramento where I was let out, and then I came back to San Francisco to help my wife, Marie, in her little linen shop.

PL: You speak of you wife, Mari Jaans Hibbits, when did you

meet her?

Mr. H: I met her during the depression of the 30's and we were married during the war about the last year of the war. I helped her in the shop after getting out of service. Marie was born in France and a good many of her relatives are in Belgium and Luxenberg. During the war her family was put in prison. She had come to America before the war started and she was visiting there when the war did start, her ship was burned up and she had trouble getting back to America. Her three sisters, one brother-in-law were put in prison as they did not cooperate with the Germans. One sister was helping Allied fliers escape over the border. Marie had some art training in Europe and then took art classes in San Francisco from Lucien Labere, French artist

PL: Did your wife have to be sponsored in order to come to the U.S?

Mr. H: No, she had come in 1929 and worked with some families, some rich families here as a governess, in fact one of her charges was Gloria Vanderbilt. Marie was teaching her French and piano. I'm sure it was Gloria Vandrebilt, as there was some conflict in the family.

PL: What was this shop you had in San Francisco?

Mr. H: I had been designing with silk screen printing in the Air Force, and I used this technique on place mats, monograms, and other things in the linen shop.

PL: Where was the location of the shop?

Mr. H: It was on Post Street, near Maiden Lane.(a very exclusive

location in San Francisco) We had a fairly good business. Marie bought the materials and I designed the patterns. We lived in S.F. on Telegraph Hill.

PL: When did Marie start working with rice paper in her art?

Mr. H: That was after we came here (Buellton) and we bought this property. She went to some adult education classes in art. She learned some things from me but she also worked independently. She invented this unique way of painting on rice paper. Instead of the conventional edging, she would tear the edges of the paper. She submitted some of her work to the Arts association in Santa Barbara and became a member very early on.

PL: How soon after the war did you decide to come to the Buellton area?

Mr. H: First we made a trip to visit her family, right after the war, and then we came to Buellton and bought this property in about 1950.

PL: Do you remember that trip in 1947? Was it by boat? Mr.

Mr. H: Yes, we made several trip to Europe. All her family came through the war alright, some had been sick though. One nephew went to Dachau Concentration Camp for suspected of helping the underground. Her niece was forced to join the Hitler Youth. They were all mistreated but survived. I think 1947 was one of the happiest times of Marie's life because she was able to visit all of her family from Luxenberg and Belgium. The countryside at Antwerp was bad looking, sunken ships

with their masts sticking above the water. In general those countires were occupied but there was no fighting there. During the last part of the war, the Battle of the Bulge, took place near Luxenberg and Marie was all upset thinking Germany would take control again, but they were driven out.

PL: In 1947, was that your first trip to Europe?

Mr. H: I had made a trip in 1937 by myself to Russia where I did some drawings that I still have.

PL: Tell me about this trip in 1937?

Mr. H: I had saved up a little money and I had been offered a job but before I started with the job I wanted to travel so I went to Paris and Moscow. I was away about a month and half. The first impression of Moscow to me was how gray everything was. In this country we are used to neon sights bill boards with color but in Moscow it reminded me of black and white news reels, very dismal and gray. I made some drawing of people carrying shopping bags and sweeping streets and I had to submit these drawing to the officials and they did not like my drawings. They went through my luggage looking for guns. At that time there was a program called Intourist, they had started to encourage travel in their country but you had to follow certain routines, Leningrad, Moscow, Yalta. The people seemed to like us (Americans) I remember riding on a street car and one of the men kept looking at my pants, they were made of corduroy, he came over to touch my

corduroy pants. I knew a few Russian words. With Intourist you were given a card and you could eat at this hotel where I stayed. It was exciting for me because in those days the Spanish Civil War was on. In fact I was on a Russian boat for awhile and I cut my hand, a woman sailor saw what happened and she pulled me into the kitchen and bandaged my hand real fast. I loved Paris it was a beautiful place. War broke out in 1939, but in 1937 everyone was thinking of the Spanish Civil War. The Germans and Italians were using their bombers on the Spanish people.

PL: Why did you choose to live in Buellton?

Mr. H: Maria had the idea I should be near my family. When we came back to Lompoc I worked on the ranch, in 1947, but Marie wanted to own property. She had owned a little lot nears Mills College in Oakland and she sold that and we made a down payment on this piece of property in Buellton. She had seen a for sale sign. Later on we bought property in Santa Barbara. This lot had the old ice house on it, and we lived in the ice house in the beginning, while I was adding on. I had some art classes so I built a studio. I also had classes in Adult Edcation.

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

PL: Who was your neighbor?

Mr. H: The Lauretsens. We saw our first television program at their house.

PL: Was FitsGerald operating the store next door to you?

Mr. H: No, Budd and Bodine and the store faced the east, not as it is today.

PL: Was Robert Andersen operating Pea Soup Restaurant?

Mr. H: Yes, in fact Juliette Andersen, his mother was French and Marie got acquainted with her right away. These two ladies were the only French speaking people around at the time. Well, there was one other person and these three would get together and speak French, a^{to} joy them all. Anton had died by this time. They called Robert, "Pea Soup" Andersen. The post office for Buellton was across the street (Hwy. 245) in the tiny building now longer there, and a very small library was near where our present library is now. The school was where the present post office is now. I remember I had to letter the sign for the school, "Buellton School" and I remember it was raining when I had to get up there to letter the sign.

PL: Do you remember Jeannette Lyons?

Mr. H: Yes, we met her at some point in this area, I don't remember if she was principal of Buellton School then or now. Buellton was very small, Mr. Lauretsen told me that when they came it was all barley fields. Later what is now Ave. of Flags was Hwy. 101 with four lanes of traffic.

PL: Do you remember when all the business were moved back to

accomodate that new Hw. 101, in the 50's?

Mr. H: Oh yes, and when Hwy 246 was widened the highway department moved our house back, there was a mistake made as it was four feet to close to the highway, and they had to move our house one more time. I have seem a lot of changes and the town keeps getting bigger all the time.

PL: What do you do if a person whats to take art classes but has no artistic abliities?

Mr. H: There is always some things they can do waithout any great talent. Certain types of lettering, I have taught a lot of that. Certain kinds of design they can learn, most of my students want landscape work and we used to go out to different sites for that.

PL: You were a friend of Roscoe Carver?

Mr. H: Yes, he used to go out and photograph the subject he wanted to paint first. He had a very good stype of water color too. In fact we had a little gallery with him at Mattei's Tavern for some time. We took a room upstairs at the tavern and called it The Art Loft. The room was a bedroom before. Another person had a room where she sold jewelry. That worked out very weel for us for awhile. The man who owned the tavern then was Bud (Gordon) New.

PL: What is the hardest subject in drawing?

Mr. H: Figures are the most technical. I had quite a bit of that in art school, we took anatomy, a whole term of anatomy before we even thought of doing figures, so that is the most technical. In conventional paining prespective comes

into it. That is difficult. But I taught figure drawing in art school and adult ed.

PL: Which style do you like best?

Mr. H: Acrylics, oil slows you do too much, you can't put a line on the canvas on wet oil and also your brushes have to be washed out with turpentine with each new color. Acrylics have been found to be more permanent than oils, so most artists are using that now. Acrylic is really a plastic and it does not fade.

PL: What are you doing now?

Mr. H: I belong to the Art Association in Santa Barbara and I have produced some paintings for their art shows, they have juried shows and good shows, I have one there now at the Falkner Gallery in the main Library. I also belong to the Santa Ynez Valley Arts Association. The Santa Barbara arts group has over 100 members, Santa Barbara has quite a good art community. Some of those here in our valley are Ann Raleigh, Harriet Ingraham, Lidia Bell, Ray Connors.

PL: Is portrait painting hard?

Mr. H: Yes, because you are usually painting for someone else's idea. It is a little like commercial art. I remember one time I made a portrait for a woman who then came back ten years later to have the color of her hair in the portrait changed. One time I was doing a portrait of a woman who never stopped talking so I told her I would do all the face except the mouth, until she stopped talking so I could get the mouth right.

There is an art show in Los Olivos soon and I have to take some work over there tomorrow to the old Sides Show. I am busy making frames, special orders.

PL: Does an artist see things differently from a non artist?

Mr. H: No, I don't think so the things that might interest me might not interest you. a person who looks at clouds, if they are a meteorologist they would say that is a certain type of cloud but I look at them and say the light is coming from the left or above, so I apply those aspects to the subject and that makes it more interesting to me. I use memory to a great extent. It was much better when Marie was alive because we used to plan things out together but I'm getting along alright.

PL: Thank you Mr. Hibbits, for this interview today.

End of interview